



Human Artifice and the Science Fiction Film

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Human Artifice and the Science Fiction Film

The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For some time now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also "artificial," toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. . . . There is no reason to doubt our abilities to accomplish such an exchange, just as there is no reason to doubt our present ability to destroy all organic life on earth. —Hannah Arendt¹

"I know I'm human," the protagonist of John Carpenter's film *The Thing* asserts, as he frantically searches for a threatening alien presence among his comrades. Taken out of context in this way, such a declaration sounds almost pointless, like an assurance of something that should be evident to the gaze of those around, as indeed it seems to the movie viewers. The very need for such an assertion, consequently, hints at an unexpected uncertainty here, even an uneasiness about one's identity and, more importantly, about what it is that makes one human. It is an uneasiness, moreover, which cannot be dispelled by a simple gaze, the means by which we typically evaluate our world, others, and ourselves. I call attention to the character McReady's predicament because it makes overt a specter which has continually haunted the science fiction film genre. Periodically throughout its history, but increasingly so in recent years, this formula has taken as its focus the problematic nature of the human being and the difficult task of being human. And as Hannah Arendt makes clear, the former concern seems to pose an ever greater barrier for the latter.

In this context, we should note the number of recent films which take as their major concern or as an important motif the potential doubling of the human body and thus the literal creation of a human artifice. Among others, films like the remakes of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Thing*, *Blade Runner*, *Alien*, and even *Star Trek* explore some aspect of this motif, but especially a

welcome or threatening capacity which inheres in this cloning or copying of the self, cell for cell, and which promises to make man both more and less than he already is. Not simply a current development, though, this motif runs throughout the history of science fiction film. Viewed from the perspective of their "mad scientist" themes, the numerous Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde films represent paradigms of this tendency; in fact, the enduring confusion in the popular imagination that attributes the single name of Frankenstein to both a monster and its creator underscores the effect of this doubling pattern. One of its earliest and most characteristic treatments, however, occurs in a film that many see as the prototype for the genre, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. The modeling of the heroine Maria into a destructive android look-alike serves as the narrative's centerpiece and prompts its greatest display of scientific gadgetry—that which we have come to expect to be the very core of the science fiction film. Visually indistinguishable from the real Maria, the android threatens to unleash dangerous desires in the human community and thus bring about disaster. Because she is both alluring and potentially destructive, the artificial Maria well represents the disturbing implications of that capacity for doubling and artifice which man's science has attained.

Probably the landmark treatment of this doubling motif occurs in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which focuses precisely upon a threatening possibility for perfectly duplicating the human body, "cell for cell, atom for atom," as one character explains. In this case, it is an alien life form that uses nature wrongly, to grow seed pods which will deprive man of his own true nature, as they duplicate his body, "snatch" his intellect, but deprive him of all emotional capacity. While films had previously presented such duplication as a threat, the product of human aberrance or some misguided science, *Invasion* added a disconcerting note and also laid open

a desire which has frequently moved just beneath the surface of these films, by pointing up a subtle attraction at the heart of the doubling process. The bloodless victory of the copy, of the pods, is actually lauded by those who have been subsumed into this emotionless community. This reaction suggests an elemental desire in man for the security and tranquility which the sameness of duplication promises; as another character notes, this transformation permits man to be “born into an untroubled world” and to abdicate from the many problems of modern life—problems posed, it is implied, by the very advances of science, especially in the field of warfare, which, on the surface, usually seem a basic concern of these films.

Don Siegel, director of the original *Invasion*, admits that he sought to inject this challenge of attractiveness in response to a widespread desire he noted to abdicate from human responsibility in the face of an increasingly complex and confusing modern world. To this end he

purposely had the prime spokesman for the pods be a pod psychiatrist. He speaks with authority, knowledge. He really believes that being a pod is preferable to being a frail, frightened human who cares. He has a strong case for being a pod. How marvelous it would be if you were a cow and all you had to do is munch a little grass and not worry about life, death and pain. There's a strong case for being a pod.²

It is this “strong case” that has been repeatedly and increasingly stated in films since the time of *Invasion*. *The Stepford Wives*, for instance, plays not just upon the threat of a gradual, insidious replacement of the women in a small town by mindless, dispassionate androids—apparently the perfect housewife—but also on the terror implicit in their similarity to what is held up as a cultural ideal and in the fact that this duplication is obviously desirable to those closest to the women, their own husbands. Perhaps because of our increasing concern with the potential for cloning and genetic research, such possibilities no longer seem so far-fetched, hence the recent spate of films exploring this complex proposition. They all emphasize man's fascination with knowledge and science, as has always been typical of the genre, but they link a single-



INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

minded pursuit of knowledge with that disconcerting desire to duplicate the self—or unleash the unknown power of duplication, as in *The Thing*—and its consequent rendering of the self almost irrelevant. In sum, they suggest how the human penchant for artifice—that is, for analyzing, understanding, and synthesizing all things, even man himself—seems to promise a reduction of man to no more than artifice.

This paradox also sheds some light on a subtle distinction which the science fiction film has typically sought to make in its depiction of man's attitudes towards science. As critics have frequently noted, the genre often seems to juxtapose a good and a bad science, white and black magic, as it were, with the one working to serve man and the other to threaten his position in the world. We might recall the novel *Frankenstein's* subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus*, for it can help us to discern an even more telling distinction at work in the film genre. In its recurring manifestations, the doubling motif denotes a Faustian drive for knowledge or power, a dangerous and even self-destructive impulse behind that fascination with the power of science or some select knowledge to enable man to duplicate himself artificially. This Faustian impulse, however, typically tries to go masked as a Promethean one, that is, as a desire to bestow significant boons upon man. Of course, it is in the nature of those boons—not light but likeness, and not the potential of fire but its destructive force—that we eventually perceive the Faustian persona beneath the Promethean seeming that science and the scientist usually bear in the genre.

Why this seeming, however, and why should its ultimate expression take the very shape of seeming, namely the doubling or copying of the self? The persistence of this theme hints at a certain hubris of the mind with which the genre is concerned: a pride in a science which is seen as seeking to accommodate all things to the self, ultimately even the self which, because of a lingering Cartesian dualism between the mind and body, thinking and feeling, has become associated with both the internal life of the mind and an external world of otherness, the not-mind.³ The fashioning of other bodies, other forms of the self, only reinforces that split between mind and body and reasserts the hegemony of the former over the latter. What I would like to suggest, following Arendt's lead, then, is that we might see in this doubling motif the indication of a science turned inside out, a drive for knowledge and control become a desire for oblivion, although it is a blind desire, as the self unwittingly turns upon itself, even while apparently engaged in a process of valorizing the self through the ability for replication.

The full paradox and threat inherent in this artificing of life lurks just beneath the surface of a film like *Alien*. In fact, the film's central horror, a monstrous presence that thrives on man, yet is apparently invulnerable to his normal defenses, seems metaphoric of some flaw within man, perhaps the Faustian drive that increasingly seeks expression. The murderous alien is brought into the spaceship because the company sponsoring the flight has established a primary directive for the crew to gather any information on life forms that might prove valuable. Arguing for this directive, and thus directly precipitating the alien's murderous rampage among the crew, is an android, a replica of man so perfect that he fools his fellow crewmembers. A perfect example of the danger behind this doubling pattern, he has been programmed to ensure the mission's knowledge-gathering activities, regardless of any danger which might accrue to the human component of the expedition. In the film's most startling scene, the alien creature that has embedded itself within one of the crew members suddenly bursts through his chest, killing the human host. Born from within man, this creature metaphorically embodies the monstrous potential of the double

which has made its life possible. In short, the alien represents the displaced terror and true frightening aspect of that desire for knowledge which, also arising from within man, has begun to produce life-threatening doubles. It is only through this perspective of displacement that the complex plotting of *Alien*, and especially the discomfiting relationship between android and monster, comes into proper focus. In his discussion of the nature of man's proclivity for doubles, René Girard predicts just such a link and connects the desire for doubling to man's most violent impulses; as he notes, there is "no double who does not yield a monstrous aspect upon close scrutiny."⁴

The new version of *The Thing* specifically emphasizes this "close scrutiny," that is, the visual problem posed by the double. When a scientific research team stumbles upon and accidentally unthaws an alien creature embedded in the polar ice for thousands of years, they unleash not simply a monstrous creature, one that threatens those discoverers, but a figure that seems to summarize the problems of doubling located in both *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Alien*. As one character notes, this creature "wants to hide inside an imitation" and it possesses the power to "shape its own cells to imitate" any other being in its environment. That this capacity for perfect mimesis is not simply a protective mechanism, like a chameleon's color adaptation, but a very real threat to man is underscored by the gruesome scenes of possession and transformation for which the film has been scored on occasion. In fact, *The Thing* seems to draw on *Alien*'s "chest-buster" sequence as a model for these scenes—a connection which underscores the importance I have here attached to that previous scene and one which hints at an internal component in this alien doubling. What *The Thing* particularly adds to the previous formulations of this doubling motif is an emphasis on the contagiousness of this tendency, and thus its more than individual menace. As the doctor among the group calculates, at its current rate of assimilation of man, the alien polymorph could take over all of humanity in "27,000 hours from first contact." It thereby threatens rapidly to reduce man's world to a realm of imitations, to make everyone simply an extension of that alien presence.

With the awareness of this threatening possibility, an equally devastating potential also emerges, one which inheres in every act of doubling. Because man is possessed of an absolute desire for certainty or knowledge—at least, so the science fiction genre argues through its emphasis on the compulsion for knowledge—he can easily become prey to an almost debilitating anxiety in the face of whatever stubbornly resists his attempts at formulation. And when the enigma is his own double or potential double, the anxiety may take even deeper root. Almost frantically, therefore, the men at this isolated outpost reach out for some answer, some assurance, even “some kind of test,” as one of them puts it, which might detect this alien presence in their midst and thus assure them that they are all just what they appear to be, truly men. Significantly, however, this task of detection and inquiry into the visible world quickly transforms into a suspicion of the human society in which they are immersed, even an uneasiness about the self; as one man asks, “how do we know who’s human?” It is a question that betrays a deep-seated fear, normally kept hidden yet essentially commonplace, of all that is not the self. Calling attention to this rapid breakdown of human society which the alien visitation has precipitated, McReady notes that “Nobody trusts anybody now.” What such a comment also bears witness to is an alien potential which resides in man, ever ready to be triggered by circumstance and to raise a disturbing suspicion not only about one’s fellow man, but even about the self and its relationship to that human world it must inhabit.

What *The Thing* locates, therefore, is a certain *thing-ness* within man, an absence or potential abdication from the human world which can only be made present or visualized in the mirror furnished by the doubling process. The confrontation with which the film ends, as McReady and a black man, the only other survivor of the group, eye each other suspiciously, each equally sure that the other is only a double fashioned by the alien, metaphorically points up the distrust and fear which already typically mark modern society, and particularly its race relations. Of course, the doubling process which the alien initiated promised to render everyone the same, each

an extension of that single intruder, and in their mutual fear of the other McReady and his comrade have already fulfilled that promise after a fashion. Moreover, that threat precipitates with both men a retreat into the private space of the mind, the one stable ground upon which they feel they can still stand. In effect, the mind is thus seen as the true repository of the self, protectively questioning all about, while asserting with ever decreasing conviction one’s own humanity, as we have already seen McReady doing. If that phrase, “I know I’m human,” seems to ring hollow, it is because the narrative, through its visitation of this disconcerting doubling, has managed to undercut all certainty, all dependable knowledge, certainly all reliance on appearance. Consequently, at the film’s conclusion even we are unsure if one or neither of the survivors is indeed a copy, just waiting his chance to spread his mimetic reign into the outside world. Indeed, we are left to question the very future of man’s life on earth, just as Arendt does.

In another sort of investigation into the nature of our modern culture, Loren Eiseley has attempted to trace out the process by which “man becomes natural,” that is, how he came to see himself as a part of nature and its historical processes, rather than as a strange occurrence and an intrusion into the natural world. “Before life could be viewed as in any way natural,” he explains, “a rational explanation of change through the ages” was needed⁴; man had to acquire a thorough knowledge of the patterns of evolution. The recent film *Blade Runner* dramatizes the logical consequences of this mastery of evolutionary principles. The development of this understanding, the film suggests, serves as the springboard for the current concern with the possibilities of genetic engineering, which, in its turn, has generated a potential for scientifically controlled evolution: the creation and programming of perfect replicas of man, gifted with unusual beauty, strength, or intelligence, and made to serve their human creators. As a result of this original step in “becoming natural,” however, apparently something has also been lost. As Eiseley points out, while “man has, in scientific terms, become natural . . . the nature of his ‘naturalness’ escapes him. Perhaps his human freedom has left him

the difficult choice of determining what it is in his nature to be.”⁶ The problematic nature of human nature is precisely the topic on which *Blade Runner* with its formulation of the doubling motif attempts to shed some light.

As in *The Thing*, a sense of uncertainty and the anxiety which attends it seem to color the very world of *Blade Runner* and to derive in large part from the fascination with doubling which it chronicles. The futuristic environment the film describes seems perpetually dark and rainy, as gloomy as that of film noir—the conventions of which *Blade Runner* does in fact draw on. In this bleak atmosphere we can see mirrored an interior darkness that afflicts the characters here and seems brought on by the problems arising from a culture practically predicated upon the possibilities of duplication. In this future world, man has progressed to such a point that he can genetically design and reproduce virtually anything that lives; thus we see mechanical birds, snakes, dogs, and especially people—or “replicants,” as they are here termed—all of which are virtually indistinguishable from the real thing. They have been fashioned by man’s science in order to satisfy his various desires, to free him from labor and the dangers of combat, or simply to amuse him. And yet in spite of these benefits, no one seems truly happy in this society; in fact, those who can do so readily abandon this world in favor of one of the “off-world colonies,” doubles of the earth itself which, like so many of the copies here, are apparently perceived as being better than their original. We thus see a vision of man not only no longer at home with himself, but no longer at home with his home; and the human doubles promise to increase the level of anxiety by refusing to remain in their servile roles and demanding instead a life like that of their creators and models.

As is typically the case in the science fiction genre, then, a kind of monstrous creation has transpired, but it has gone masked as scientific advance. In the place of Frankenstein are two geneticists—Dr. Tyrell, master designer of replicants, and J. F. Sebastian, his chief genetic engineer. Both appear to have given that Promethean impulse free reign, pushing the desire to fashion a copy of man to its extreme in their specially designed androids for every

task and every distraction. The ostensible project of providing for human needs, however, has clearly been submerged by a pride in the process of doubling itself. Tyrell, it seems, is moved solely by his fascination with creating ever more perfect copies, replicants which can defy those tests for humanity which have developed in this future world—just as *The Thing* predicts. And with the girl Rachael, whom he addresses at one point as “my child,” he has nearly succeeded. Sebastian has turned his engineering skills to no less subjective end, the task of filling his lonely life with manufactured “friends,” albeit small, misshapen, flawed figures—apparently various reflections of his own flawed body, which suffers from “premature decrepitude.” In sum, these scientists have turned their capacities for creating copies to their own ends, and in the process have endowed their creations with a certain reflexive capacity, Tyrell’s figures mirroring his own desire for perfection, beauty, and transcendence of mechanical limitation, Sebastian’s reflecting not only his own defects, but also his flawed view of himself.

In these projections of the self, moreover, both have already created the conditions that must eventually render them irrelevant. Because they have programmed their replicant creations with memories of a life that never was—even providing them with photographs of supposed relations and friends—and thus tried to convince them of their humanity, these engineers have erected a potentially dangerous bridge between the human and android realms. In fact, they have succeeded too well, for they have unleashed a synthetic but powerful desire for real life, one which—as is the case in films like *Frankenstein*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *The Thing*—initially places itself in opposition to the possessors of normal life, mankind. In attempting to return to Earth from the off-world colonies, the group of replicants with whom the narrative is concerned have already killed 23 humans; and after finding their way back, they predictably turn their attention to their creators, particularly Tyrell and Sebastian. What they quest for is the secret of their programmed lives, and particularly, after the fashion of men through the ages, the means to a longer life. In effect, they have embarked on a Pro-

methean search of sorts, seeking the archetypal fire of life itself, but in that murderous trail they leave behind, we see the clearest signs of that violence which, as René Girard has noted, usually goes masked by the doubling process.⁷

An even more telling measure of the ambiguity which attaches to this doubling process is found in the absence of a sure anchor for our own sympathies in this situation. That is, in the absence of the more typical monstrous presence and as a natural outgrowth of the desire for a nearly perfect mimesis which has produced these doubles, our concern shifts uneasily about between the world-weary, alienated bounty hunter Rick Deckard and those replicants whom it is his task to hunt down and destroy. Another and equally compelling reason for these shifting sympathies, of course, is that, as we quickly recognize, both man and android here essentially share the same—a doubled—fate. Like Sebastian, the replicants suffer from their own form of premature decrepitude, a programmed mortality which ensures their inevitable death after four years of service. As a consequence, these androids face the same sort of disconcerting knowledge that man has always had to abide with, that of an inescapable and onrushing death. Fed up with his work as a bounty killer, meanwhile, Deckard meditates on the nature of his quarry and, in turn, begins to wonder about his own place in this confusing welter of being wherein everything, perhaps even himself, seems to have its double or be itself a copy. Thus he comments at one point, “Replicants weren’t supposed to have feelings; neither were blade runners” like himself. It is a complex mirroring pattern which has resulted from the doubling process, as men and androids begin to see themselves in each other and, discomfitingly, prod the others into a questioning of their very nature.

In the character of Rachael, Tyrell’s nearly perfect replicant, this increasingly blurred distinction between man and the copies with which he has become obsessed finds its clearest example. Accepting the testimony of his own experienced eye, Deckard is initially fooled into believing her human, and he finds himself mysteriously attracted to her. What is more unsettling is that his fascination continues even after he administers the Voight-Kampff Empathy Test which reveals that she is a



The replicant Rachael in BLADE RUNNER

replicant. The precise meaning of those test results quickly seems to evaporate in light of Rachael’s manifest “humanity,” however: her love of music, desire for affection, concern for others, and apparently a love for Deckard. Her response to the test’s conclusions, asking Deckard, “Did you ever take that test yourself?” only compounds his quandary; it causes him to reflect on his own humanity, on the nature, that is, of a hired killer. As a result of this reflection, the subsequent order to kill Rachael along with the other replicants prompts a marked shift in the blade runner’s attitude, a questioning of that which usually goes unquestioned, namely the humanity of those who create—and destroy—these artificial lives. He thus refuses the order and instead runs off with her to spend whatever little time her short, engineered life leaves them together in a different world, as a last shot indicates, a realm of light, greenery, and life, rather than the dark, rainy cityscape which has produced them both. In effect, Deckard takes Arendt’s warning to heart, abandoning “the human artifice of the world”

in favor of a natural environment in which man might regain his truly human nature.

If it seems ironic that a replicant or double should provide the stimulus for such an awakening to the self and a proper sense of humanity, it may be a telling indication of how far modern man has come in his fascination with artifice and how much he has lost in exchange for that knowledge of how to double the self. No longer viewed simply as the abnormal desire of aberrant types, as in the numerous films which have focused on mad scientist types, doubling has here become the very hallmark of society, something its members take for granted—but like many things we take for granted, it is also a pernicious influence. As *Blade Runner* suggests, when this abiding fascination with doubling becomes a dominant force in man's life, he clearly runs the risk of becoming little more than a copy himself, potentially less human than the very images he has fashioned in his likeness. Man's scientific advances, in sum, threaten to render him largely irrelevant, save as an empty pattern within which knowledge might be stored and through which it might extend its grasp, further increase its capacities, and expand the realm of artifice.

At another level we should find it most fitting that a double should spur an awakening to a sense of self. In essence, another form of the doppelgänger archetype, the replicant might be expected to serve the sort of salutary function that other archetypal patterns do. In explaining the effect of archetypal images on the psyche, psychologist James Hillman notes that "reversion through likeness, resemblance," affords the mind "a bridge . . . a method which connects an event to its image, a psychic process to its myth, a suffering of the soul to the imaginal mystery expressed therein."⁸ In such "resemblance," he claims, there is located a path to a psychic truth which we have forgotten or lost sight of amid the welter of modern-day experience. Because of its reflective dimension, then, the image of the double, android, replicant, or copy holds out a great promise, even as it seems rather threatening, for it carries the potential of bringing us back to ourselves, making us at home with the self and the natural world almost in spite of ourselves. We might view the combat between Deckard and the android Roy Batty in

exactly this context. In the middle of their fight, Deckard slips from the top of a building and dangles precariously in the air; only the outstretched hand of Batty, grabbing Deckard at the last moment, stops his fall and brings him back from the brink of death to a possible life. It is precisely the sort of saving potential or "reversion" which always inheres in the image of the double and which may ultimately best explain the continuing fascination it holds for us.

In attempting to map out the large territory of fantasy narratives, Tzvetan Todorov identifies a singular tension at work in the form which reflects the fundamental experience of its audience. Both reader (or viewer) and protagonist, he asserts, "must decide if a certain event or phenomenon belongs to reality or to imagination, that is, must determine whether or not it is real. It is therefore the category of the real which has furnished a basis for our definition."⁹ As a result of this indeterminacy, we experience "a certain hesitation" as we try to "place" the events of the narrative within a known field of personal experience or reservoir of knowledge, just as the story's characters do. In this moment of hesitation, we should be able to discern the problem of representation which lies at the genre's very core, for we hesitate because of an immediate challenge to our usual system of referents, the stock of images which lived experience normally affords. At the same time, of course, that hesitation achieves a valuable purpose in prompting this stock-taking and thus starting a most subtle reflective experience.

In its recurrent concern with a doubling motif, the science fiction film thus draws on one of the fantastic's deepest structural patterns. In those images which fall outside of our normal lexicon, the film genre admits to a mystery or enigma that is at its center; and in bracketing the image of man—through those copies or replicants—within this enigmatic category, it admits of a puzzle to which we too are a part. Even as it limns the progress or potential of science, reason, and knowledge, therefore, the genre also acknowledges an underlying mystery and ambiguity, certainly in the approximations with which our mimetic impulse has always had to content itself. The fact that these disconcerting copies are in our own shape reminds us how little science has

yet learned of substance about man, how little, in essence, we know about the most alluring of models for mimesis. As Arendt noted—and as our accomplishments in genetic engineering every day point up—we already possess the potential which science fiction films have so frequently described, that for crafting artificial versions of man. What these films hope to forestall is the dark obverse of this capacity, that for making human nature artificial as well.

NOTES

1. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 2.
2. Quoted by Stuart Kaminsky in *Don Siegel: Director* (New York: Curtis Books, 1974), p. 104.
3. For a more detailed discussion of this split between the rational and sensory or emotional aspects of man, see Vivian Sobchak's *The Limits of Infinity* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1980), and Lane Roth's "The Rejection of Rationalism in Recent Science Fiction Films," *Philosophy in Context*, 11 (1981), 42-55.
4. *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), p. 160. As Girard notes elsewhere, "mimetic desire cannot be let loose without breeding a midsummer night of jealousy and strife," "Myth and Ritual in Shakespeare," in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), p. 192.
5. *The Firmament of Time* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 72.
6. *The Firmament of Time*, p. 114.
7. In addition to *Violence and the Sacred*, see Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1966).
8. *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 4.
9. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 167.

Reviews

ATOMIC CAFE

Produced and directed by Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty. Music coordinator: Rick Eaker. Distributor: Archives Project, Inc., Box 438, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

Near the beginning of *Atomic Cafe*—a compilation film composed entirely of clips from 1940s-50s sources—a TV news reporter describes Julius and Ethel Rosenberg's last moments. With averted eyes and melodramatic pauses, the reporter hints at being overcome with emotion at the horror and gravity of the moment he is describing. An actor's craft builds us up to the punchline about Ethel Rosenberg "finally going to meet her maker—(beat)—she'll have a lot of explaining to do . . ."

Editor's Notebook (continued)

it will require several weeks for copies to arrive, so they should be ordered when the initial reading list for the course is prepared. This practice not only rewards the journal for printing useful material, it will give students valuable exposure to the full contents of an issue and thus might lead them to think of subscribing.

Camus once said something to the effect that we should act so that, if everyone followed our example, it would prepare a decent future. We urge our loyal readers to remember that photocopying is not a trivial act. It has substantial economic consequences. More serious, perhaps, is what *sub rosa* copying teaches by example and implication: that journals are expendable. —E.C.

CONTRIBUTORS

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This scene and the entire Rosenbergs sequence represents one example of the subtlety and levels of resonance carefully pieced together by the editors (Jayne Loader and Kevin Rafferty, who are also, along with Pierce Rafferty, the film's producer/directors) of *Atomic Cafe*. The (offscreen) cloud of smoke arising from Rosenberg's head after she is electrocuted makes a macabre metaphor for the film's entire set of preoccupations: the mushroom cloud hanging over us all; threat of horrible death; pathological anti-communism of the period; the power of the authorities; and the human beings (s)trapped at the center of it all. The principal message is, *imagine yourself during a nuclear war*. Somberly accom-